



# WHAT A WORD IS THIS!

Jesus Casts Out a Devil at the Synagogue in  
Capernaum

## **ABSTRACT**

In the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus speaks in his hometown of Capernaum in the Synagogue. A man vexed by Devils, arises and cries out that he knows who Jesus is. Jesus casts the devils out of the man in front of an astonished congregation, showing his sovereignty over supra-natural events....

**Elizabeth Kirkley-Best**  
**Judah's Glory Bible Studies: Series: Healing of Christ**



## What a Word is This?

### Jesus Casts Out a Devil in the Synagogue at Capernaum



by Elizabeth Kirkley Best on April 13, 2010

#### **The First Devil Jesus Casts Out: At The Synagogue at Capernaum**

While the casting out of devils is often included among the healings of Jesus and his disciples, the expulsion of demonic forces in a person is in a sense different from the other healings because it involves the process of freeing the person from a form of captivity involving mental and emotional status, although the distinction is somewhat

arbitrary, since both physical healings and the casting out of devils involve spiritual, emotional, cognitive and physical healing. Certain physical 'symptoms' go with devil possession: blindness, deafness, and dumbness, for example, as the devil 'overpowers' the faculties of a person, blocking, as John Bunyan once pointed out the 'Ear gate, the Eye gate, and the gate of the mouth' commandeering the person's abilities for a satanic habitation. Still, though the lines are somewhat blurred, the casting out of devils remains a more eminent evidence of the divine battle which Jesus fought: he was taking back what was rightfully his: The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel.

The time and place of the casting out of this devil, is also remarkable: Jesus is at the beginning of his earthly ministry, and while it is not the first time he has taught in the Synagogue at Capernaum, it is one of the first as he begins the path to Golgotha: right before the casting out of the devil at Capernaum, he has announced in Nazareth, that He is the fulfillment of the promise of Messiah.

Luke 4 shows Jesus teaching from Isaiah 61 in what may be seen as his 'Inaugural Address' declaring the words of Isaiah the prophet fulfilled:

Luk 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

Luk 4:17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Luk 4:20 And he closed the book, and he gave [it] again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

Luk 4:21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

Nazareth is where Jesus grew up, and as He would teach," a prophet is a prophet everywhere but in his own country", and the crowd was taken with wrath as He declared the fulfillment: they ran him out of town, by first trying to throw him over the nearby cliff! Coming from one of their own this must have sounded disturbing, and over and over throughout his ministry, as Israel saw the wonders and miracles and healings of God, they were awestruck, they thronged him seeking healing and teaching, and yet they also were afraid at something so opposed to the ordinary, to the natural, that they could not reconcile the 'new thing' and became terrified. (e.g. the casting of devils into the herd of swine).

Jesus moves soon after to Capernaum, his home town, where he once again begins at the Synagogue, preaching the Kingdom of God, but a few things have already occurred: Simon, Andrew, James and John have been called (Mk 1:16,19-20), and it is after the Holy Spirit as a dove descends in the ensign of Baptism by John the Baptist. (Mk 1:9-10) This is after the temptation in the wilderness (MK 1:13), and as mentioned above, directly follows the heralding of his ministry, and the attempt to destroy Him by throwing him off the cliff at Nazareth (Luke 4:29-30).

Jesus enters the Synagogue in Capernaum on Shabbat. (Mark 1:21) In the Synagogue, among the other believers, there sits a man with what is described as an 'unclean spirit'.

And there was a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out; Saying Let us alone; what have we to do with thee thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. Mk. 1:24

This confrontation with the Lord and Savior, before more is known is astounding: the devils know who Jesus is, and are afraid of him. They cry out, "...Let us alone; what have we to do with thee thou Jesus of Nazareth...". Someone once tried to suggest that if the devils knew who he was, then maybe he was not of the Lord. Time and again, during his ministry, the Pharisees tried to ascribe his works to the devil but invariably showed a lack of knowledge about the scriptures. The devils are AFRAID of Jesus: they demonstrate the knowledge of his utter sovereignty, and that He is the Holy One: "...art thou come to destroy us? I KNOW THEE WHO THOU ART, THE HOLY ONE OF GOD. (1:24). They are of an uncomfortable, but divine realm: they know who Jesus is: the long awaited and promised, the 'covenanted' Holy One of Israel. It is interesting to note that the term 'Holy One of Israel' is used 31 times as an exact term in the Old Testament, and not in the New Testament, save for this passage. The shorter term "Holy One" is used 6 times in the New Testament, but mostly in quoting the Old, and always referring to Jesus. The devil also uses the name "Jesus of Nazareth"- pointing to the location he was raised and has just been: most do not realize that before the days of Jesus, there is no city named 'Nazareth'—which means 'Branch', and no doubt comes from nazirim, which was, of course, a holy one, set apart for the work of the Lord.

The devil also knows that Jesus is capable of their destruction: no such interchange, even with the greatest of prophets has taken place before in Israel. So here we have, a Sovereign Holy One of God, who is capable of destroying the demonic. He is anathema to them: they cry "let us alone; what have we to do with thee? the implicit response being 'nothing'.

### **Jesus Responds to the Devil**

Jesus, while willing for the time of his sojourn here, to teach any who asked, never spends time in dialogue with devils: he casts them out. It is no less true here:

Mark 1:25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him."

He silences the devil, perhaps not wanting it to even speak of the things of God, and commands the devil to let go of the man in the Synagogue driven to disrupt the service and his purpose. The Authority of God is clearly seen, and is shortly to be remarked upon here: the presence of God is seen and felt. He speaks directly to the devil, to the 'unclean spirit' though and not to the man per se. Why? because oftentimes in possession, the devil has crowded out the free will of the person. It is easy when we see a person who has such a bizarre and anti-social countenance, acting in unholy ways to feel ill towards the person: if the reason though is demonic, the person is as much the victim or more than those offended by his actions.

## Casting Out an Unclean Spirit

The unclean spirit “*akathartos*” (compare to the idea of un-cathected or without cathexis) ἀκάθαρτος and spirit, *pneuma*, πνεῦμα is described in Thayer’s as having to do with the idea of moral uncleanness, but also as of an uncleanness pertaining to ritual law described in Leviticus. In the one mention of an unclean spirit in the Old Testament, in Zechariah 13:2 the unclean spirit is associated with false prophecy: true prophecy is in line with a healthy and pure lifestyle.

Unclean spirits in the New Testament are associated always with a devil or demonic activity and always in the context of casting out the devil from a person. In one instance we will study later, the unclean spirits are allowed into a herd of swine which violently run off a cliff.

Violence characterizes the casting out of demons. (‘Devil’ and ‘Demon’ are used interchangeably, though in the KJV, only devil is used, the word for devil is δαίμονιον or *daimonion* (demon). Devil when referring to Satan is ‘*diabolos*’. In the cases of casting out demons or devils, the meaning is clearly, ‘an inferior spirit’, obviously not of the Kingdom of God. The violence of a devil letting go of a human host is seen here:

“And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice he came out of him”.  
Mark 1:26

In more than one healing, two we have already seen (e.g. Father with the son with a dumb spirit who is thrown in the fire) the unclean spirit has no love of its human host. Examples in scripture of the violent behavior of devils while possessing their host or exiting their host include throwing the person into fire or water, gnashing, foaming, a loud voice or cry, and similar characteristics. This healing is no exception: the spirit TEARS the man, right there, on Shabbat in Synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 4:35) and cries with a loud voice, and throws the man, but then exited, leaves him alone:

And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him and hurt him not.  
Lk4:35

Once the devil is cast out, there appears to be no further harm, unless the person willingly lets down the defense of a pure life and mental/spiritual state, in which case it is Jesus himself who teaches and warns, that the process of letting down that defense opens the person up for an even more powerful overthrow (7 times).

The devils Jesus or his disciples cast out also appear to have **a hierarchy and rank**: for example in Daniel, there is a mention of ‘principalities’ when referring to the ‘prince of Persia’, or in the New Testament when we speak of withstanding the powers of darkness:

Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places].

And Jesus is referred to as having ‘spoiled principalities’ in triumphing over the devil on the Cross.

Col 2:15 [And] having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Principalities alone are neither good nor evil: they are a level of reign or rule, but devils in the divine battle appear to have ‘offices’ or rank. Satan has ‘minions’ of the 1/3 fallen angels. Lucifer is a created angel who is allowed for an uncertain reason and season to operate before the end, not a ‘bad or evil god’ but a created being gone bad who must like all the rest of creation bow before a Holy God, and the Name of the Lord and Savior. Phil 2:10

### **What a Word is This...the ‘New Doctrine’**

The people in Synagogue that day, in Jesus’s hometown, had already been astounded: can you imagine the depth of sermon Jesus must have just preached! And from Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary whom all know! And following, a remarkable event: a devil cries out in terror at the presence and sound of the Savior’s voice. A devil cries that he knows who Jesus is—not the hometown boy, but the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel: the Messiah. Devils do not know everybody—in Acts, when Sceva and the vagabond Jews try to use Jesus’s and Paul’s name to cast out devils, the devil cries

Act 19:15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

Even more astounding, Jesus casts out the devil in the presence of his most difficult audience: those who saw him grow up, and the man is thrown by the devil into the midst of them! They had never seen a devil called out! They thought it was a new doctrine and commented on the word, of the Word of God:

Mar 1:27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine [is] this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

Luk 4:36 And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word [is] this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.

The Word says they were ‘all amazed’ and talked among themselves as to the new teaching. They are dumbfounded at his authority, not only over people, but over the unseen. They comment on his power, crying ‘What a Word is this?’

## **The Result**

As with most of the wondrous works and healings, the immediate result is found in Mark 1:28

Mar 1:28 And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

The parallel passage regarding the casting out in Luke adds only that the location and time was directly at the time of his ‘fulfillment’ address’ but the time after in Capernaum. Nonetheless the casting out of the unclean spirit in the Synagogue comes

- 1. After he reads Isaiah 61 in Nazareth and declares it fulfilled**
- 2. After he rebukes Capernaum in the Nazareth Synagogue for unbelief (4:23), and**
- 3. After the violence already mentioned.**

Jesus’s ministry, the sojourning of Yshua among us, comes from a number of silent years, then comes in power: God, Emanu-el is back face to face in Israel, and he is beginning to make a few things clear, about the Kingdoms of this world vs. the Kingdom of Heaven. His Son is no minor Prince, but Sar Shalom, with authority over all other kingdoms, not only of this world, but of unseen realms. The Word of God (John 1:1) delivers the Word (Is 61) in power, and with His Word, puts Satan on notice that his dark kingdom has no ultimate authority over the Kingdom, reign and rule of God in his Messiah. What a Word is this? What a Word is this, indeed!.

Till next time, much healing and many blessings.

Elizabeth Kirkley Best.

## Key Terms and Concepts

Synagogue

Capernaum

Vexation

Devils

Emannu-el

Kingdom of God



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By Elizabeth Kirkley Best

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